



Holy Thursday

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Thursday 14 April, 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

On the wall of my office in Adelaide Terrace I have a print of a painting by Sieger Koeder, a German priest and artist, who died in 2015. Another copy of the same painting hangs in my sitting room in the Cathedral presbytery. It is an artistic representation of the Washing of the Feet which is, of course, normally such an important part of our celebrations for Holy Thursday (although this year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic we have opted to omit it from the liturgy).

Although, as tonight's gospel makes clear, the Lord washed the feet of all his disciples, this painting only shows Peter and Jesus. Jesus has his back to us and he is bent over the bowl of water he is using to wash Peter's feet. Peter, with a look of bewilderment on his face, has one hand resting on the shoulder of Jesus and the other held up as if to stop Jesus from going ahead with what he is doing. In the background there is simply a table with a cup of wine and a plate with a piece of bread on it, divided into four, thus making the sign of the cross between the four pieces.

It is only if you look very closely that you realise that, although we cannot see the face of Jesus, his image is, in fact, reflected in the bowl of water he is about to use to wash Peter's feet.

As I ponder on this painting I can't help but wonder if the artist is inviting us to reflect on the truth that, although we do not see Jesus face to face in our day-to-day lives, we do in fact encounter him, both in those people whose feet we seek to wash - that is, those people whom we seek to serve - and in those people who are ready to wash our feet, to put themselves at our service. Perhaps this is partly what Jesus means when he says to his disciples, and therefore to us, "*If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you too should wash each other's feet.*" It is as if he is saying to us: *if you wish to seek me and to find me, you must reach out beyond yourself and put yourself at the service of others. For that is where I am to be found.*

I have a copy of another of Sieger Koder's paintings which hangs on my wall at home: it depicts the central event of the Last Supper and is, in that sense, a companion piece to the painting of the Washing of the Feet. In this second painting all the disciples are present, gathered around the table on which is placed a cup of wine and a loaf of bread, broken into a number of pieces. We see nothing of Jesus except his hands: it as if the artist is standing behind Jesus looking over his shoulder. Jesus is about to pick up the cup, the chalice, and again when we look closely we



see the face of Jesus reflected in the wine which is in the cup. The message in this second painting is, at least for me, the same as the first. We may not see Jesus face to face in the daily reality of our lives but, in faith, we recognise him in the bread and wine of the Eucharist which become his body and blood, present to us and for us, inviting us to welcome him into our lives and into our hearts.

The interplay, the interconnection, between Jesus present in the Eucharist and Jesus present in those to whom we are sent in humble service, is at the very heart of the mystery we celebrate tonight. Jesus invites us to recognise him in the Eucharist and to allow him to draw us into an intimate communion of love with him – and why? So that when we go out from the Mass we go so closely united to him that we can then recognise him, and serve him, and love him, in our brothers and sisters, especially those who are in need. And, as we begin to see our brothers and sisters through his eyes, we then begin to carry them in our hearts, as the Lord holds us close in his heart. In this way we are not only participators in the Eucharist which we celebrate together in Church: we **become** the Eucharist by bringing the presence of Christ into the lives of others. We become, in a very real and powerful way, the signs and bearers of the love of Christ for his people.

Our faith is a precious gift, given to us, not for ourselves alone, but so that we might be these signs and bearers of the love of Christ to and for others. The desire for communion with the Lord, which brings us before the Blessed Sacrament in prayer and which impels us to come forward to receive him into our lives in Holy Communion, will always, if it is genuine, give rise to a desire for life-giving communion with others. It will always impel us to break our bodies and spill our blood - to give ourselves away - for the good of others, so that others may know the joy of having Christ in their lives, as we know this joy in our own.

During this life we may not see the Lord face to face - that is something which awaits us as we pass through the gates of death - but we can see him, and serve him, and love him in all those we meet if we allow him, through the gift of the Eucharist, to help us see with his eyes, and listen with his ears, and speak with his words, and love with his heart.

Then, perhaps, we will be counted among those about whom Jesus spoke when he said on the night of his resurrection to Thomas, *“You believe Thomas because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe”*.